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ABSTRACT

Participants in a symposium on economic development in rural New York State analyzed existing strengths and weaknesses of the state's rural areas and made policy suggestions relating to three broad goals: (1) ease government constraints on rural businesses in order to encourage growth and development; (2) build on and strengthen the positive factors that will improve the well-being of rural businesses and families; and (3) enhance New York's rural economy through improved production and dissemination of information, as well as local, regional, and statewide networking to produce and use the information. Strengths identified included the work ethic of the rural population, the existing entrepreneurial spirit, availability of natural resources, the healthy rural environment, and the diversifying economic base. Weaknesses covered concerns such as the present tax structure, soaring construction costs, and uncoordinated government services. Policy suggestions included equity in the share of per capita state assistance flowing into rural New York, requiring rural impact statements to accompany all new regulations, improving communication between state and local agencies, centralizing information gathering and dissemination functions, and creating a rural development corporation that would focus private and public resources on the special needs of rural New York. (JHZ)

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BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, AND EMPLOYMENT IN RURAL NEW YORK STATE: AN ACTION STRATEGY

NEW YORK STATE LEGISLATIVE COMMISSION ON RURAL RESOURCES
SENATOR CHARLES D. COOK, CHAIRMAN

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INTRODUCTION

Presented herein is one of the nine reports of the Second Symposium of the Legislative Commission on Rural Resources.

The first Symposium, held in 1983, began a process of both analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of Rural New York and establishing public policy goals which ought to be pursued.

Throughout 1984, the report of the first Symposium was scrutinized through a series of ten public hearings held across New York State.

A final report entitled "Rural New York in Transition" was published in January 1985. That report provided the raw material from which the Second Symposium began constructing an "Action Strategy for Rural New York."

The Second Symposium convened February 6, 7, and 8 at the Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, with more than 180 rural advocates from across upstate New York in attendance. In workshop sessions, Symposium participants hammered out a list of action responses to the problems which were placed before them in "Rural New York in Transition."

The results of their work are proudly and gratefully submitted herewith.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the special efforts of some 40 persons who performed leadership tasks.

These include: my collegues from the legislature who chaired the workshop groups; the staff personnel from both the Senate and Assembly, as well as from several administrative departments, who assisted with the planning and conduct of the Symposium; and, members of both the Commission staff and my own legislative staff who cooperated as clerical and technical support for the workshop leaders.

Whatever else may result from the Symposium, this report is testimony to the existence of a rich reservoir of dedicated, talented people who have a deep commitment to preserving the best of rural New York's heritage. Our progress thus far has been encouraging. It is important, however, that we continue moving forward in fully developing rural New York's considerable potential to improve the quality of life for the state as a whole.

Senator Charles D. Cook
Chairman
Legislative Commission on
Rural Resources

FOR YOUR HELP IN UNDERSTANDING THIS REPORT

This report is a working document rather than an historical account; therefore, it is constructed in a format that will enable you to follow the logical progression through which the final action recommendations have been formulated.

Participants at the second Symposium were asked to review the report entitled "Rural New York in Transition", henceforth to be referred to as "the report."

From the report, each workshop group was asked to identify three areas of concern toward which they would direct their attention. You will therefore find this document divided into those three categories. Throughout this publication, the numbering system is purely for ease of identification and does not signify any sequence either of importance or procedure.

Heading up each area of concern is a generalized goal.

The goal is then defined more specifically into two categories:

First are the assets and undeveloped potential of rural New York which are capable of being utilized more fully;

Second are identified problems and shortcomings which will be addressed.

Following, is a list of existing tools which can be used in achieving the goal. It is assumed that using whatever resources are at hand is the first step to be taken.

The last analytical step identifies those problems which will continue to be stumbling blocks in developing an effective strategy.

Finally, with a well-developed statement of purpose, the Symposium workshops put aside the survey report and began to formulate a response to the purpose they had defined.

Even though each workshop group was presented with an outline of procedure, the differences in subject matter and the divergence in group dynamics which developed in the respective workshops resulted in differing formats for the recommendations which were developed. These are presented in basically unedited form for your consideration and comment.

At several points in the above presentation, the Commission has inserted material from the 1984 public hearings which clarify or expand upon the basic item under consideration.

FOCUS ON ENCOURAGEMENT OF GROWTH

Goal Statement One

Ease government constraints on rural businesses in order to encourage growth and development.

FOCUS ON ENCOURAGEMENT OF GROWTH

Related Strengths and Assets

- Existing labor force.

  - A pervasive work ethic and a strong track record of productivity combine to make the New York worker a viable asset in the production of high-quality goods and services.

New York State's greatest rural resource is the people residing in these areas. Rural New Yorkers possess a work ethic that is not likely to be prevalent among urban residents. This work ethic and attitude of commitment yields a productive work force that can contribute immeasurably to the success of a business or industry. It is a resource that should be viewed as the primary element for addressing rural concerns.

Dr. David Huntington
President
SUNY Ag & Tech College at Alfred

- Existing entrepreneurial spirit.

  - The individual entrepreneur and small business person may hold the key to economic growth and development in rural communities, since it is in small firms that most of the new job opportunities are being created in the state and national economies.

One hundred percent of new jobs created in the past six years have been due to small business. Corporate and industry jobs have been mostly stable, with losses in one industry compensated for by gains in another.

James King
Executive Director
SUNY Small Business Development Center

Related Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Diversifying economic base.

  - All of rural New York's "economic eggs are not in one basket". Such business diversification tends to neutralize the effect of periodic single-industry fluctuations.

How far each county can diversify has an awful lot to do with where that county is located, from the standpoint of a major population area, and the resources the county possesses. We grew as a part agricultural, part resort industry county. The mobility of the population has affected our resort industry to the extent that it's narrowing down to a few very sound establishments, and to compensate for that decline, light manufacturing industry is being sought.

Ed Curtis
Chairman
Town of Delaware Planning Board
Sullivan County

- Existing transportation facilities.

FOCUS ON ENCOURAGEMENT OF GROWTH

Impediments and Related Weaknesses

- Present tax structure, particularly the real property tax and personal income tax.

  - Personal, sales and real property taxes fund public services and facilities, which serve businesses and communities. Yet taxes, which are excessive or inequitable in assessment calculations, provide salient arguments for businesses and people to relocate outside New York State.

High sales, property, utility and personal income taxes keep business away or motivate others to leave. High personal income tax provides a direct disincentive to remain in New York state or move to New York state.

William Donohue
Former Commissioner
NYS Department of Commerce

- Increasing mandates on local governments and private businesses.

- Regulatory schemes imposed upon all businesses uniformly, whether large or small, manufacturing- or service-oriented, and so forth.

One factor business has cited as contributing to a faltering New York State economy is over-regulation. Admittedly, there is a lot of overlap in our regulatory institutions. We have to look at them with an eye toward streamlining them.

William Donohue
Former Commissioner
NYS Department of Commerce

- Assistance delivery systems scaled primarily for urban problems.

  - The statistical picture of rural life, communities, and resources in New York State is skewed by the inexact method of interpolating numbers from the standard metropolitan areas used by federal and state agencies.

Impediments and Related Weaknesses (cont'd)

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Small Cities Community Development Block Grant program has an urban bias in the sense that communities that have concentrated areas of problems tend to be looked at more favorably in their application than more spread out areas. It's a whole population thing: if there aren't large numbers of population, you tend not to do as well with most of the funding programs.

Paula Osseni
Economic Development Supervisor
Sullivan County Planning Board

- The need to re-educate or re-train our existing workforce to take better advantage of new enterprises.

  - Rural counties have lower proportions of their adult populations with college experience than do metropolitan counties. This may slow the movement of rural economies toward taking optimum advantage of the changes occuring in New York's shift toward a post-industrial service economy.

- Inability of rural areas to maintain, improve, and plan for needed infrastructure.

  - Soaring construction costs, failure to institute periodic maintainence, and lack of funds threaten to put much of rural New York's public facilities in a state of disrepair.

- Lack of capital for the private sector in rural areas.

  - Sources of venture capital may not be adequate to support major new initiatives and, as banks continue to consolidate and merge, private venture capital may become even less available.

Policy Suggestions

- Provide equity in the share of per capita state assistance which flows into rural New York by:
  - Revising funding distribution criteria to eliminate any urban bias;
  - Including more weight for the ability of the locality to pay in the formula;
  - Considering the cost of a service to the community as well as its benefit, in deciding whether it should be a mandated program. Because of low population densities, service delivery in rural localities necessarily is often more costly on a per capita basis using urban-oriented delivery methods.
- Increase available capital for existing businesses as well as for attracting new businesses.
- Revise existing funding programs to target small projects that meet rural needs and circumstances. Smaller projects needing less money are just as important to rural communities as larger, more expensive projects are to urban areas. Examples include:
  - A revolving loan fund with a strong local input component and with participation restricted to endeavors benefiting rural areas;
  - Loan guarantees which would provide operating funds in addition to capital construction funds.
- Streamline and target existing programs to meet rural circumstances.
  - Community development legislation should be examined to insure that rural development ventures are eligible for an equitable share of available funding;
  - Set asides should be required, and performance criteria developed, to ensure that programs actually encourage and accept projects benefiting rural areas;
  - Application procedures should be revised for loans and grants under $200,000 and regulations should be flexible to expedite smaller rural projects.

Policy Suggestions (cont'd)

- Require state agencies to prepare a rural impact statement on all new regulations.
- Encourage the growth of rural entrepreneurs by:
  - Removing disincentives in the personal income tax structure for growth and capital accumulation;
  - Easing gift and estate taxes for transfer of businesses from one generation to the next;
  - Development of a special rate for capital gains transfers;
  - Reviewing (and, as appropriate, re-writing) regulations and report requirements for small-versus-large businesses to assure that undue or inappropriate hardships are not imposed on smaller businesses;
  - Reviewing (and, where appropriate, re-writing) regulations pertaining to tax assessments on small-versus-large businesses to assure more tax equity for small businesses;
  - Establishing regulations that permit state and local tax abatements for business expansions as well as new businesses.
- Expand public/private partnerships.

The restructuring of private/public partnerships in which business, government, and educational institutions play decisive roles is an important trend to be noted in many recent New York development efforts, especially in the development of new financing mechanisms for rural industry and business.

Kim Blot
Director of Rural Affairs
NYS Department of Ag & Markets

- Provide free education at community colleges for people who have recently lost their jobs, are currently unemployed, and looking for work.

Policy Suggestions (cont'd)

- Encourage the growth of export-base businesses in the state by offering differential tax advantages or tax abatements for the establishment or expansion of businesses which sell most of their products to firms in other states or nations.

- Increase available capital for communities to improve their physical infrastructure under a matching grant program.

FOCUS ON RURAL ADVANTAGES

Goal Statement Two

Build on and strengthen the positive factors that will improve the well being of rural businesses and families.

FOCUS ON RURAL ADVANTAGES

Related Strengths and Assets

- Rural New York is ideally positioned at the geographic center of major markets with potential access to financial, creative and informational resources.

- Energy costs, long thought to be excessive and a disincentive to economic development in New York State, are now more competitive with other regions.

- Water resources include an abundance of lakes and rivers, as well as access to ocean facilities available for commercial and sport fishing, recreational use, energy production, and transportation.

- Mineral resources present additional potential for economic growth. Natural gas, talc, ores, and other resources can be tapped and utilized for New York's economic base.

- Forests provide essential raw materials suitable for home use, export, energy production, and wood product manufacturing. This renewable resource has the potential to revitalize the finished products industry in rural New York communities.

- Abundant, fertile soil and a favorable climate provide an opportunity for further growth in agriculture.

I think our greatest strength in New York State is our natural resources. We have the soil and the weather for agriculture to do well.

Donna Burr
President
Schoharie County Farm Bureau

- Clean, crisp, fresh air makes rural New York attractive to a variety of people both as a vacationland and as a place to live and work.

- An extensive system of local educational institutions, particularly agricultural and technical colleges, community colleges and BOCES, offer a wide array of programs and curricula. Technical, vocational, academic, and life-skill programs, coupled with research capabilities at universities, provide students with basic competencies to join a productive work force.

Related Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

We have an excellent education system here. Our high schools are graduating many people who are heading on to college. Our community college here is outstanding, as they are throughout the state. In the rural areas there is no lack of availability of productive people.

Richard Lanza
Chairman
Sullivan County Private Industry Council

- A pervasive work ethic and a strong track record of productivity combine to make the New York worker a viable asset in the production of high-quality goods and services.
- Despite recent economic downturns, more people are employed today in rural New York than at any other time in history.
- New York State governments do a good job of providing services and set a standard for the nation (i.e., good transportation, educational services, and parks/recreational facilities).

We offer for consideration the suggestion that our strong county governments be a recognizable state asset. Counties in New York State are major providers of services; close enough to people to respond to their needs, but large enough to gain by economies of scale. They can insure that the minimum of services are provided to rural towns and villages that these local units might otherwise be unable to generate themselves.

Delmar Palm
Majority Leader
Cortland County Legislature

- Rural New York possesses such transportation capabilities as an extensive road network, airports, waterways, and rail lines that provide effective movement of people, raw materials, and finished goods.
- A strong cultural heritage and sense of community pervade rural New York localities.

Related Strengths and Assets (cont'd)

- Rural New Yorkers are intent on making the personal investment required to plan and revitalize commerce and industry in rural areas. "Helping thy neighbor" is a rural tradition which fosters a sense of community, and volunteerism is prevalent.

Impediments and Related Weaknesses

- Rural New York shares concerns about toxic waste disposal and the conservation of existing resources from pollution. Acid rain, pesticide residue, and hazardous industrial waste can no longer be ignored, even if cost- and time- constraints imposed to combat these problems tend to dissuade some industry from expanding or relocating in rural New York.

- Rural localities often compete with each other in economic endeavors, hindering the design of coordinated economic policies that transcend traditional boundary lines. This situation is fueled by lack of understanding of the strengths, weaknesses, and appropriate responses for various localities and regions.

Local officials need more information on the value of each resource indigenous to their area in order to form a balanced view of their assets and a balanced approach to development. Many communities are making policy decisions which allow irreversible loss of valuable resources in the interest of short-term gain. These conditions exist for several reasons. One is the almost exclusive reliance on the property tax to generate local revenue. This causes competition among neighboring communities to increase their individual property tax base.

Loretta Simon
Hudson Valley Heritage Task Force

- Uncoordinated government services aimed at solving the same problem often duplicate each other and hinder state and local efforts that would otherwise benefit a locality through a smaller commitment of resources if adequately coordinated; for example, the State's Departments of Health and Environmental Conservation, as well as the federal Environmental Protection Agency, are all concerned with local sewer systems, often working against each other rather than in a coordinated fashion. Clear lines of authority are lacking.

- Unemployment levels in rural New York have been consistently higher than in metropolitan counties during the past 30 years. Factors contributing to this include the movement of the manufacturing sector to automation, the entrance of additional family members into the work force, and the growth in overall size of the labor force.

Impediments and Related Weaknesses (cont'd)

Since 1960, the most rural counties have had unemployment levels 50 percent higher than metropolitan counties.

Paul Eberts
Professor
Cornell University

- Soaring construction costs, failure to institute periodic maintenance, and a present lack of funds threaten to put much of rural New York's public facilities in a state of disrepair.

- In some areas of rural New York, inadequate public transportaion services (airports, rail lines, and buses) create barriers to economic growth.

There is an excellent opportunity for economic growth if the transportation system is good enough for people to live here and get to where they can employ their skills. I'm thinking in terms of IBM and computers. There's a huge job market for people over in the next county, but there's a tough hill to get over in the winter. Our transportation system is going to have a lot to do with whether they work or not.

Ed Curtis
Chairman
Town of Delaware Planning Board
Sullivan County

- Decisions about economic development activities in rural areas are often made by institutions located in metropolitan areas, for instance, by metropolitan-based banks and multi-locational corporations, using metropolitan-scale criteria in their decisions rather than rural-scale criteria.

FOCUS ON RURAL ADVANTAGES

Policy Suggestion

- Create a rural development corporation which will focus private and public resources on the special needs of rural New York. The corporation would:

  - Provide a central clearinghouse for development information--financial, technical, and organizational--a one-stop center for information on available programs and proposals;

  - Provide professional staff assistance on a regional basis, for consulting services to be made available to entrepreneurs and local development agencies alike. These professionals would be available to do feasibility studies, collect data, and prepare preliminary project designs, so that polished proposals would be available for funding applications or new client presentations. The professional staff would be supported by public money to ensure ongoing commitment to the program.

  - Provide funds or access to funds (loans, participating loans, revolving loans and/or loan guarantees) for expansion, venture, or working capital. As a source of funds, the public benefit corporation would serve as a conduit for existing programs as well as create new ones tailored to the needs of rural New York. The new funding programs could be created at the state or regional level, and should be flexible to recognize differences in rural areas of the state. On statewide sources of funding, the central office will have an auditing committee which would review the financial aspects of an application only to determine if it is within sound banking practices to make the loan. Primarily private money (i.e., banks, pension funds, insurance companies) will be sought to create a revolving loan fund or other loan programs to encourage development. There should be no restrictions on the uses of the money (i.e., manufacturing, wholesale, retail, commercial projects). Specifically, the corporation will be encouraged to use a portion of the money to provide working capital and promote new markets;

  - Coordinate existing information sources and network with them for wider dispersion of new ideas and approaches to development;

  - Provide research and development of new markets (export potential, direct markets, etc.) and new businesses that would take advantage of inherent strengths of rural New York;

  - Ensure that only rural communities are actually participating by

Policy Suggestion (cont'd)

not allowing access to the funding or the expertise by HUD entitlement communities (over 50,000 people) or counties over 200,000 population;

- Be run on a regional level by individual boards of directors. Board members would be drawn from over the entire region, and would be appointed by the counties within the service area. The boards would determine which projects would be advantageous to the region and which will be undertaken, and would promote the networking function.

FOCUS ON INFORMATION

Goal Statement Three

Enhance New York's rural economy through improved production and dissemination of information, as well as local, regional, and statewide networking to produce and use the information.

Related Strengths and Assets

- Higher educational institutions in rural New York.
  - Technical, community, four-year, and land grant colleges have the capability to act as information gatherers, processors, and disseminators, and can also assist in the rural development process.

Most of the community colleges have a long history of cooperation between local business and industry and, as a result, have developed considerable expertise that can be available to potential new employers. They are trying to keep these people happy, help them to expand, and certainly not give them any reason to think that they might have to move.

John Walters
President
Sullivan County Community College

- New York State Departments (Commerce, Transportation, Labor, etc.) are storehouses of valuable data.
- The State Data Center and its affiliates.
- Cooperative Extension offices across the state.
- Community action agencies offer relevant perspectives on the impacts of development upon people in the community.

Impediments and Related Weaknesses

- Insufficient technological capability in rural New York, specifically:
  - Some telephone systems are not able to accept computer transfer of information;
  - Insufficient computer hardware and software available in rural areas;
  - Insufficient trained computer equipment users in rural areas;
  - Insufficient access to pertinent state-level information resources.

In a global economy, New York needs to offer business and industry an environment that provides adequate telecommunications for inventory and dollar transactions between headquarters and remote sites. Without that capability, New York will not attract more businesses.

Greg Benson, Jr.
Director
Center for Learning Technologies
NYS Education Department

- Insufficient collaboration and networking among local and state economic development organizations.
- Senseless competition among and between various local and state agencies dealing with rural localities.
- Insufficient coordination among information gatherers, processors, and disseminators--e.g. people at colleges and universities have not worked at peak productivity with local and state, public and private officials and agencies on rural economic development issues.

FOCUS ON INFORMATION

Policy Suggestions

- Standardize computer hardware and software protocols in state agencies and compile the data they gather into a usable form for local development agencies:

  - A single state agency (e.g., Office of Local Government Services, NYS Department of State; the State Data Center; or the rural development corporation suggested in Goal II, above) should take responsibility for accumulating, processing, and disseminating information pertinent to local economic development, as well as for coordination with other local and state agencies, colleges, and universities in these endeavors;

  - Existing Department of Commerce field staff are uniquely positioned to facilitate local level networking, and to accept public input on improvement of information gathering and dissemination functions.

In some states, sources of information are centralized and reports are generated routinely. In New York State we have many sources of information, although at times it appears one state agency doesn't know what the other is doing. This leads to duplicaiton and confusion. We suggest the Commission on Rural Resources consider promoting integration and consolidation of data bases, and promoting access to the data base in program activity.

Delmar Palm
Majority Leader
Cortland County Legislature

- Provide financial and technical support for the initiation of local economic development conferences on an annual basis in order to stimulate debate and share experiences, specifically to:

  - Exchange ideas and strategies;

  - Identify development opportunities;

  - Create a local economic climate that is receptive to new ideas and more capable of timely responses to opportunities;

  - The conference will be co-sponsored by a variety of public and private, local and state agencies, under the leadership of a

Policy Suggestions (cont'd)

designated local development agency (perhaps county planning offices, or regional planning and development boards). Community colleges would provide an ideal location for such conferences.

- Require all local development agencies to prepare, implement and update local development plans:

  - Matching grants to local organizations will encourage this planning function;

  - Direct local agencies to cooperate with each other in order to facilitate cohesive regional plans for economic development.

- Make state officials aware of the need to be sensitive to, understanding of, and responsive to rural local officials and their goals. Likewise, local officials must be made aware of the information available from the state and be trained to utilize it to local advantage:

  - Fluidity in information flow both laterally among development actors and vertically throughout all levels of government is to be encouraged.

BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & EMPLOYMENT WORKSHOP

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